



## Should children of color be concerned about the sun?

Many believe that only Caucasians need to be concerned about the sun. It is true that the darker your children's skin color the more natural pigment they have to protect their skin from the sun. But even the darkest skin can be damaged by too much sun exposure, though the effects may not appear until adulthood. ***All children should be cautious and protected from getting too much sun.***

**Sunburn** is the most obvious effect from too much sun and one of the few to show up directly. Other problems do not show up for many years.

**Skin cancer**, especially a type called melanoma, is the most serious health problem resulting from too much sun. Although it is not common in dark-skinned people, when it does happen, it is often not found until later stages when it is more dangerous. Sunburn during childhood is the main cause of melanoma.

*According to noted African American dermatologist, Dr. Susan Taylor, "There's a misconception among African Americans and Hispanics that they cannot get sunburn."*

Other forms of skin cancer (basal and squamous cell carcinomas) can result from long-term exposure to the sun, so that even if your children never get sunburned, they may still be getting too much sun.

**Lupus**, a common skin disease among African Americans, is worsened as a result of overexposure to the sun. **Early aging of the skin, cataracts** (the blurring of vision), **other eye problems**, and **immune system suppression** (making your children more susceptible to other diseases) are other health effects resulting from too much sun.

### When are Children Most at Risk?

Children under 6 months are most at risk. Since their skin is extremely sensitive, keep them out of the sun entirely.

The sun is strongest in the spring and summer, between 10am and 4pm. It is also more intense in more southern areas and in the mountains.

The reflection of the sun can be intensified by water, sand, snow and light-colored walls or pavement.

While clouds block sunlight, most harmful rays still get through and can harm the skin.

### **What Can a Parent or Guardian Do?**

Here are some easy ways to reduce your children's sun exposure while they play outdoors:

**Avoid the midday sun**, particularly those hours between 10 am and 4 pm when the sun is strongest. Plan outdoor activities for your children earlier or later in the day.

**Wear sunglasses.** Purchase sunglasses for your children and get them to wear them on bright days. Look for ones that say they provide 99-100% ultraviolet B protection.

**Wear protective clothing.** Hats with brims offer good sun protection, though ball caps don't protect ears and necks. Loose-fitting, long-sleeve shirts and pants that are made from a tightly woven fabric are best. A typical T Shirt blocks only about half the sun's rays. If your children are super-sensitive to the sun, special clothing is available that blocks nearly all the sun's rays.

**Use a sunscreen** that has a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15. Remember the higher the number the more sun protection it provides. Apply to your children 15-30 minutes before going outside and reapply every few hours, particularly if they have been sweating or swimming. Waterproof or water resistant sunscreens are good but can be rubbed off. Apply to all exposed skin, including hands, feet, and ears; these are places where skin cancer most often appears. Don't forget to protect your children's lips; numerous lip balms are available with sunscreen. Finally, ***never use sunscreen on children under 6 months*** - instead keep them out of the sun to protect their sensitive skin.

**Teach your children** at an early age about the dangers of too much sun exposure and actions they can take so they can enjoy outdoor play without harming their future health.

**Check the UV Index** developed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Weather Service. This index, on a scale from 0 to 10, measures the strength of the sun's rays and the danger of getting too much exposure. It can be found in most weather reports (newspapers, TV and radio) during the summer. Use it to help plan your children's activities and determine the best way for them to dress.

**For More Information on Sun Protection and Other**

*Often the names "sunscreen" and "suntan lotion" are both used to describe the same product. This can be confusing. It gives the impression that the product is for someone wanting a suntan. Forget the name, look at the Sun Protection Factor (SPF). Always choose a product providing a SPF of at least 15.*

## **Environmental Threats to Our Children:**

EPA's **SunWise Program**: [www.epa.gov/docs/ozone/uvindex/uvover.html](http://www.epa.gov/docs/ozone/uvindex/uvover.html)

EPA's and NOAA's **UV Index**: [www.noaa.gov/uvb/fctsh.html](http://www.noaa.gov/uvb/fctsh.html)

**Skin cancer**: [www.cancer.org/media/story/021998\\_2.html](http://www.cancer.org/media/story/021998_2.html)

**Sunscreen**: [www.aad.org/\\_vti\\_bin/shtml....eases/sunscreen\\_effective.html/map](http://www.aad.org/_vti_bin/shtml....eases/sunscreen_effective.html/map)

EPA R3 **UV Radiation**: Fran Dougherty (215) 814-2083

EPA R3 **Children's Environmental Health Program**: contact Gail Tindal at (215) 814-2069 or Dan Welker at (215) 814-2744.